

Development and Evaluation of an Interview-Based Measure of Social-Cognitive Processes
Related to Aggression

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Social-cognitive models (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994) have identified a variety of factors that promote aggression in response to problem situations. Addressing these processes has been the focus of numerous prevention. One challenge has been the lack of suitable measures of social-cognitive decision-making processes. Many existing measures are highly structured paper-and-pencil measures that do not sufficiently assess the factors that influence adolescents' responses to problem situations. For example, adolescents may be asked to select a response to a problem situation rather than to generate one themselves. This poster will describe the development and initial evaluation of an interview-based measure of social cognitive processes. The Problem Solving Interview (PSI) is the end product of a series of qualitative and quantitative studies to identify factors that influence adolescents' responses to problem situations. Participants select a relevant problem situation from a list of situations identified in previous research and are asked a series of questions about their goals, appraisal of the situation, potential actions and perceived consequences, and self-efficacy for making various responses. These responses are coded for emotions, thoughts, goals, and perceived effectiveness, anticipated consequences, and self efficacy for specific responses.

The PSI was administered to 48 sixth grade students (half male; 85% African American) from an urban public school system who also completed measures of aggression, victimization,

and prosocial behavior. The relevance of the selected situations was supported by findings that: (a) the situations selected had happened to 79% of the students, (b) all but one participant indicated that the situation would bother him/her at least “a little” (57% said it would bother them “a lot” or “couldn’t be worse”). Students also identified a range of emotions in response to the situations: 81% indicated the situation would make them angry, 62% would feel sad, and 23% would feel betrayed. Social-cognitive variables coded from the PSI showed the expected pattern of relations to measures of behavior. Students’ reported frequency of physical aggression was positively correlated with internalized violent values ($r = .27, p = .07$), and negatively correlated with internalized prosocial values ($r = -.26, p = .09$), and positive world views ($r = -.26, p = .08$). The frequency of relation aggression was negatively correlated with prosocial values ($r = -.37, p < .01$). The frequency of experiencing overt and relational victimization was negatively correlated with negative world views (both $r_s = .31, p < .05$). Frequency of prosocial behavior was related to nonviolent heuristics ($r = .27, p = .07$). Frequency of effective nonviolent behavior was related to internalized prosocial values ($r = .32, p < .05$) and positive world views ($r = .30, p < .05$). These preliminary findings suggest that the PSI appears represents a promising approach for assessing key social-cognitive processes related to aggression and nonviolent behavior in response to problematic situations. Additional analyses are being conducted to examine interrelations among the patterns of responses. We will also highlight protocol changes we believe would improve the use of interview-based approaches to assessing social-cognitive processes in urban adolescents.